

1 PETER 3:12-18
WHEN THE DEVIL'S SIDE GANGS UP AGAINST YOU

“For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.” [quoted from Psalm 34:15-16] And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. “And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.” [quoted from Isaiah 8:12], but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.

Put yourselves in the shoes of a so-called “class misfit” at school. Not only does he or she think a little differently, or process information a little differently, or act a little differently—with the abilities God has given—but the so-called misfit easily becomes everyone’s verbal “punching bag” and the butt of everyone’s jokes. How does that feel, always having somebody on your back, making your hours and days an uphill battle for acceptance, leaving you discouraged and feeling like a failure?

Peter is writing to Jewish Christians scattered among the peoples and communities of Asia Minor—which is Turkey today. These Christians were Jewish, now living among Gentiles; they were Christian Jews living among non-Jewish idol worshipers. Two very major differences! With this letter Peter is encouraging the believers not to become discouraged while living in such surroundings—being obviously different and in the minority. Peter knew the temptation was always be there to throw it all away, to give up on the Lord Jesus and His will, to become one of the godless crowd. In the chapter before this, Peter writes *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. (I Peter 2:9-10)*

Peter’s readers were tempted to give-in to the oppressive crowds and to the style of life all around them. Likely, at times they were tempted, in anger, to “tell off” those opposing them. Peter urged them to stay calm and live as lights of Christ in their sin darkened surroundings, drawing others to Jesus instead of letting themselves be drawn away from the Lord. In Christ, every difficult situation is really also an opportunity! So often we see the negative in life, although we are under the Lord’s care, and fail to see the positive opportunities that the same provide, to grow and to be a witness of the love of God in Christ.

So it is Peter writes, *“For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil”* (a quote from Psalm 34:15-16). The Lord has your back, He has you covered. His eyes are on you. He sees what’s going on. He sees how others are ganging up on you. His eyes of kindness, mercy, and love are upon you! In the closing Benediction or Blessing each Sunday we hear the words, “The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.” The Lord is watching every day.

----- Likewise, His ears are open to your prayers. What is it you need? Stamina, wisdom, thicker skin, words and thoughts of Scripture with which to respond to people? Ask Him! The Lord hears! I remember visiting with a relative, a well-seasoned mother, in a crowd of chattering people. Her little one was sleeping on the couch. Suddenly she said, “I have to go now. I hear my little one calling.” I hadn’t heard a thing. She did. The Lord hears your cries for aid, when the devil and his henchmen in this sinful world gang-up on you.

There’s more. *But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.* Not only is He for you, but against your oppressors! Did you ever have someone “get in your face”? I mean while they are talking and disagreeing with you, they step right up close? It makes one step back a little. The Lord’s face is against your foes. They will back-off

when He at steps in for you. Think of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram from the Old Testament who challenged Moses' leadership in the wilderness. The Lord got in their face—the ground opened up and swallowed them!

How is it that God does such things for you? How is it that you are a *chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people*? Is it because you've stepped up, because you have “arrived,” because you're a home run hitter? No. The last verse of the text says, *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.* It's all Jesus. And talk about someone suffering unjustly! The just and sinless One suffered for the unjust and sinful ones. Jesus came. He is your Savior from the punishment you've earned from God every day—for the misuse of His name, for damning people and cows to hell, for “blowing a gasket” when straightening out a situation. He came to rescue you from the consequences of your own behavior. Trust Him for your pardon. His Spirit will lead you to live for Him. Christ is really the One whom the devil really wanted to convince to give up, but it didn't work. *He was put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, that He might bring us to God.* His victory was not a victory of the flesh. He surrendered to His foes, and let them have their way. But by the Holy Spirit He rose from the grave and won the real victory. That same victory is for you—forgiveness before God, life from the grave, and eternity in heaven!

And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. “And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled” (quoted from Isaiah 8:12), *but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.* With God on your side, no one can truly harm you, maybe physically, but not spiritually and eternally. Martin Luther wrote, “And take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife; let these all be gone, they yet have nothing won. The Kingdom ours remaineth!” TLH 262. In your hearts, *sanctify the Lord God.* That is, “set Him apart” on a plain by Himself in your heart and life. In your life, live and speak for Him.

Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. Are you ready and able to make a defense of your faith? Not many people feel that they are. The result is “Avoid any religious talk or Bible discussion at all costs”—unfortunately. You may feel, “To give a proper defense would take a lot of Bible knowledge and a lot of quick thinking, wouldn't it?” No one is asking you to present an attorney-style argument. A defense of faith can be found in a couple of Bible verses. Simply say, “I believe that Jesus is my Savior because the Bible says so. *God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life* (John 3:16). It's not because you say, or you think, or you've been taught so or told—but because the Bible says so. When the question comes, “You can't prove what the Bible says is true”; the answer: “I cannot. But neither can you prove that it's not true. I believe it by the power of the Word.” ---- A great comfort to me has always been Jesus' words in Matthew 10:18-20: *You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.* The Lord will help you to say the right words. Your simple job is to “speak/proclaim” that Christ is your Savior, as the Bible says He is. A second good passage is, *The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Romans 6:23). You will not be able to answer every question. We let the Scripture interpret the Scripture—easy passages shedding light on more difficult ones. But even then, some questions are just not answered.

Do so with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ, may be ashamed. Do not become rude or obnoxious, speak with meekness and “fear”—respect. Do not laugh at others for their mistaken beliefs—which will end the opportunity in short order. If your conduct is above reproach, and others still bad mouth you, people will know better, because they know you.

If suffering for Christ does come, which means God so allows it, *It is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.* The eyes of the Lord are on you. He knows. When the devil's side gangs up on you, live/speak your faith in Jesus. After Jesus returned to heaven, the disciples were jailed, warned to stop, and beaten for preaching Christ. When they were set free, *They departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ* (Acts 5:40-42).

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---